Weltbürgertum: World Citizenship

“Man cannot be free if he does not know that he is subject to necessity, because his freedom is always won in his never wholly successful attempts to liberate himself from necessity.”

Hanna Arendt, *The Human Condition*

Across Europe and the United States there are more and more voices calling for authoritarian, aggressive leaders and structures, who will take racist, nationalist and other discriminatory actions. Globalization—as an intrinsically all-encompassing phenomena that impacts our private and public life, our education and our employment, and literally all areas of our existence—has brought with it opportunities, risks, and responsibilities that concern all of us. While globalization has offered opportunities and a better way of life for some people, it has also been perceived as threatening by many, especially those who feel as if they have been left behind—both economically and socially—in our newly-globalized world. The nationalistic backlash seen in some European countries and the United States, for example, can be thought of as a reaction to a population feeling both alienated and threatened by the effects of globalization. The influence of globalization demands careful consideration and intense study on all levels: economic, social, ecological, psychological, and educational, to name just few.

Universities and colleges, which provide an internationalized environment where groups of diverse ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds meet and learn together, with and from each other, can play an important role in addressing the many challenges presented by globalization. And the diverse groups within the university, although they all may have different needs, nevertheless share the same essential desires for a good life. Hence, universities have to rise to the challenge of balancing supporting individual diversity and normative equality (based, for example, on the human condition) while fulfilling their role as effective teaching and research institutions.
Universities, as both local and internationalized spaces, are an important part of larger communities. They are expected to act as role models for socially responsible action (on the community level) and global citizenship (on the individual in a greater world). We would like to explore how universities can nurture and support such emancipatory and democratic forces. This year’s International Colloquium will examine how the concepts of global citizenship and social responsibility can serve as a possible remedy to the drawbacks of (economic) globalization.

Our colloquium aims to illuminate the possibilities and limits of the concept of “World Citizenship,” and explore the ways in which universities can help individuals open their minds to the diversity of cultures and life styles by incorporating political, psychological, and artistic experiences into their lives. Some questions we may address include:

- How can we try to consider human rights in both our students’ course of study and also as part of our work lives as colleagues?
- When we witness antidemocratic or racist behaviour, how can we help advance the ideas of inclusion and equity?
- How do extreme differences in income and assets affect social cohesion and peaceful coexistence in our societies?
- What social, political, and economic conditions need to be created in order to enable the world population to live a “good life”?

We will explore these questions and many more ideas, bringing into our discussions relevant research in multidisciplinary perspectives. By closely examining what internationalization means in concrete situations at our universities and in our communities, we will explore how it can act as a positive force that mitigates the disruptive and sometimes troubling consequences of globalization.